

A Tool for Autonomous Ground-based Rover Planning

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Abstract

This paper discusses a proof-of-concept prototype for ground-based automatic generation of validated rover command sequences from high-level science and engineering activities. This prototype is based on ASPEN, the Automated Scheduling and Planning Environment. This Artificial Intelligence (AI) based planning and scheduling system will automatically generate a command sequence that will execute within resource constraints and satisfy flight rules. Commanding the rover to achieve mission goals requires significant knowledge of the rover design, access to the low-level rover command set, and an understanding of the performance metrics rating the desirability of alternative sequences. It also requires coordination with external events such as orbiter passes and day/night cycles. An automated planning and scheduling system encodes this knowledge and uses search and reasoning techniques to automatically generate low-level command sequences while respecting rover operability constraints, science and engineering preferences, and also adhering to hard temporal constraints. Enabling goal-driven commanding of planetary rovers by engineering and science personnel greatly reduces the requirements for highly skilled rover engineering personnel and Rover Science Team time. This in turn greatly reduces mission operations costs. In addition, goal-driven commanding permits a faster response to changes in rover state (e.g., faults) or science discoveries by removing the time consuming manual sequence validation process, allowing rapid "what-if" analyses, and thus reducing overall cycle times.

Introduction

Unlike more traditional deep space missions, surface roving missions must be operated in a reactive mode, with mission planners waiting for an end of day telemetry downlink--including critical image data--in order to plan the next day's worth of activities. Communication time delays over interplanetary distances preclude simple 'joysticking' of the rover. A consequence of this approach to operations is that the full cycle of telemetry receipt, science and engineering analysis, science plan generation, command sequence generation and validation, and uplink of the sequence, must typically be performed in twelve hours or less. Yet current rover sequence generation is manual (Mishkin, et al., 1998), with limited ability to automatically generate valid rover activity sequences from more general activities/goals input by science and engineering team members. Tools such as the Rover Control Workstation (RCW) and the Web Interface for Telescience (WITS) provide

mechanisms for human operators to manually generate plans and command sequences. (Backes, et. al, 1998) These tools even estimate some types of resource usage and identify certain flight rule violations. However, they do not provide any means to modify the plan in response to the constraints imposed by available resources or flight rules, except by continued manual editing of sequences. This current situation has two drawbacks. First, the operator-intensive construction and validation of sequences puts a tremendous workload on the rover engineering team. The manual process is error-prone, and can lead to operator fatigue over the many months of mission operations. Second, the hours that must be reserved for sequence generation and validation reduces the time available to the science team to identify science targets and formulate a plan for submission to the engineering team. This results in reduced science return. An automated planning tool would allow the science team and sequence team to work together to optimize the plan. Many different plan options could be explored. The faster turnaround of automated planning also permits shorter than once a day planning cycles.

The RCW software, used to operate the Sojourner rover during the Pathfinder mission, provides visualization for vehicle traverse (movement) planning, a command interface, constraint checking for individual commands, and some resource estimation (for sequence execution time and telemetry volume). However, this tool was never intended for automated goal-based planning of rover activities. To deal with these issues, there is a need for a new tool that is specifically geared toward automated planning.

We are using AI planning/scheduling technology to automatically generate valid rover command sequences from activity sequences specified by the mission science and engineering team. This system will automatically generate a command sequence that will execute within resource constraints and satisfy flight rules. Commanding the rover to achieve mission goals requires significant knowledge of the rover design, access to the low-level rover command set, and an understanding of the performance metrics rating the desirability of alternative sequences. It also requires coordination with external events such as orbiter passes and day/night cycles. An automated planning and scheduling system encodes this knowledge and uses search and reasoning techniques to automatically generate low-level command sequences while respecting rover operability constraints, science and engineering preferences, and also adhering to hard temporal constraints. A ground-based interactive planner

combines the power of automated reasoning and conflict resolution techniques with the insights of the Science Team or Principal Investigator (PI) to prioritize and re-prioritize mission goals.

ASPEN Planning System

Planning and scheduling technology offers considerable promise in automating rover operations. Planning and scheduling rover operations involves generating a sequence of low-level commands from a set of high-level science and engineering goals.

ASPEN (Chien, et al., 2000) is an object-oriented planning and scheduling system that provides a reusable set of software components that can be tailored to specific domains. These components include:

- ◆ An expressive constraint modeling language to allow the user to define naturally the application domain
- ◆ A constraint management system for representing and maintaining spacecraft and rover operability and resource constraints, as well as activity requirements
- ◆ A set of search strategies for plan generation and repair to satisfy hard constraints
- ◆ A language for representing plan preferences and optimizing these preferences
- ◆ A soft, real-time replanning capability
- ◆ A temporal reasoning system for expressing and maintaining temporal constraints
- ◆ A graphical interface for visualizing plans/schedules (for use in mixed-initiative systems in which the problem solving process is interactive).

In ASPEN, the main algorithm for automated planning and scheduling is based on a technique called *iterative repair* (Zweben et al., 1994). During iterative repair, the conflicts in the schedule are detected and addressed one at a time until conflicts no longer exist, or a user-defined time limit has been exceeded. A conflict is a violation of a resource limitation, parameter dependency or temporal constraint. Conflicts can be repaired by means of several predefined methods. The repair methods are: moving an activity, adding a new instance of an activity, deleting an activity, detailing an activity, abstracting an activity, making a resource reservation of an activity, canceling a reservation, connecting a temporal constraint, disconnecting a constraint, and changing a parameter value. The repair algorithm may use any of these methods in an attempt to resolve a conflict. How the algorithm performs is largely dependent on the type of conflict being resolved.

Rover knowledge is encoded in ASPEN under seven core model classes: activities, parameters, parameter dependencies, temporal constraints, reservations, resources and state variables. An activity is an occurrence over a time interval that in some way affects the rover. It can represent anything from a high-level

goal or request to a low-level event or command. Activities are the central structures in ASPEN, and also the most complicated. Together, these constructs can be used to define rover procedures, rules and constraints in order to allow manual or automatic generation of valid sequences of activities, also called plans or schedules.

Once the types of activities are defined, specific instances can be created from the types. Multiple activity instances created from the same type might have different parameter values, including the start time. Many camera-imaging activities, for example, can be created from the same type but with different image targets and at different start times. The sequence of activity instances is what defines the plan.

The flight rules and constraints are defined within the activities. The flight rules can be defined as temporal constraints, resource constraints, or system state constraints. Temporal constraints are defined between activities. An example would be that the rate sensor must warm up for two to three minutes before a rover traverse. In ASPEN, this would be modeled within the "move rover" activity as shown in Figure 1. The rate_sensor_heat_up is another activity that is presumed to turn on a rate sensor heater.

Constraints can also be state or resource related. State constraints can either require a particular state or change to a particular state. Resource constraints can use a particular amount of a resource. Resources with a capacity of one are called atomic resources. ASPEN also uses non-depletable and depletable resources. Non-depletable resources are resources that can be used by more than one activity at a time and do not need to be replenished. Each activity can use a different quantity of the resource. An example would be the rover solar array power. Depletable resources are similar to non-depletable except that their capacity is diminished after use. In some cases their capacity can be replenished (memory capacity) and in other cases it cannot (battery energy, i.e. non-rechargeable primary batteries). Resource and state constraints are defined within activities using the keyword "reservations." See Figure 1 for an example.

```
Activity move_rover {
  constraints =
  starts after end_of rate_sensor_heat_up by [2m,3m];
  reservations =
  solar_array_power use 35,
  rate_sensor_state change_to "on",
  target_state must_be "ready";
}
```

Figure 1 - ASPEN Modeling Language Example

The job of a planner/scheduler, whether manual or automated, is to accept high-level goals and generate a set of low-level activities that satisfy the goals and do not violate any of the rover flight rules or constraints. ASPEN provides a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for manual generation and/or manipulation of activity sequences. Figure 2 contains a screen dump of the GUI.

ASPEN Rover Model Description

The focus of our past and current work has been to compare the automated ground-based commanding tool to the manual commanding process of the Mars Pathfinder Sojourner rover. The majority of this work was to create a rover model using the ASPEN planning system. The Sojourner planning model was built to a level at which all flight rules and constraints could be implemented. The resources include the three cameras, Alpha Proton X-Ray Spectrometer (APXS), APXS deploy motor, drive motors, solar array, battery, RAM usage, and EEPROM usage.

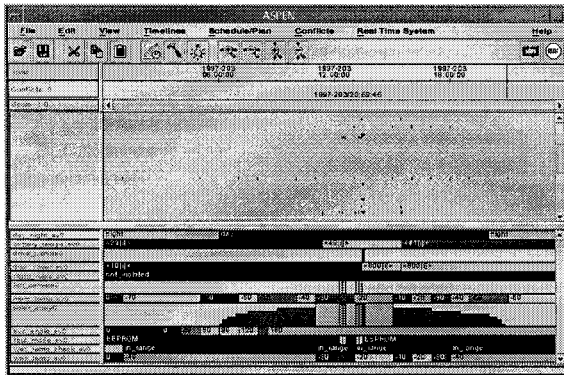


Figure 2 - ASPEN GUI

There are 27 different state variables used to track the status of various devices, modes, and parameters. Some of these parameters map directly onto rover internal parameters and others are related to the ASPEN specific model. We are not modeling all rover internal parameters because many are not useful for automating planning. We have defined 162 activities of which 63 decompose directly into low-level rover commands.

There are several constraints that affect overall operations of the Sojourner rover. These include:

- ◆ Earth-Mars one-way communications time delay (5-20 minutes)
- ◆ Limited communications bandwidth (generally < 10 Mbits downlink per sol¹ available to rover)
- ◆ Limited communications opportunities (1 command uplink, 2 telemetry downlinks per sol)

The power system is the single most important resource for the Sojourner Rover. This system consists of a .22 square meter solar array and 9 LiSOCL batteries. The batteries on Sojourner are primarily used during the night for APXS data collection. They are primary batteries and therefore modeled as non-renewable depletable resources. The solar array is the primary power source used during the day. The predicted

available solar power profile throughout the Mars day must be input before planning begins. Using a daily model is required due to changing solar array power available as a result of degradation from dust accumulation and seasonal solar irradiation variability. The angle of the solar array, which depends on the terrain, will also affect the availability of solar energy. Solar array angle estimates could be generated by RCW for input into ASPEN.

A typical Mars day might involve a subset of the following activities:

- ◆ Complete an APXS data collection that was carried out during the prior night
- ◆ Capture a rear image of the APXS site
- ◆ Traverse to an appropriate site and perform a series of soil mechanics experiments, including several subframe images of soil mounds and depressions created by running individual wheel motors
- ◆ Traverse to a designated rock or soil location
- ◆ Place the APXS sensor head
- ◆ Capture end-of-day operations images with its forward cameras
- ◆ Begin APXS data collection
- ◆ Shut down for the night

APXS data collection usually occurs overnight while the rover is shutdown. Each of these activities can be input into ASPEN as a goal for that Mars day planning horizon. The format of the input goals is RML or Rover Modeling Language. RML is an application of Extensible Markup Language (XML) designed specifically for rover operations. RCW will use RML for input and output.

The exact position of the rover after a traverse activity is subject to dead reckoning error. The timing of traverse activities is also non-determinant. Because of the inherent problems of coordinating activities between the event-based rover and time-based lander, wait commands are used to synchronize activities. When the lander is imaging the rover after a traverse, a wait command is used to ensure the rover will remain stationary at its destination until the lander completes imaging. Because the rover executes commands serially, this ensures that another command will not start execution before the previous command has completed. All rover traverse goals are generated using the RCW. (ASPEN is not designed to perform rover motion planning.) The RCW operator can fly a 3-D rover icon through the stereoscopic display of the Martian terrain. By inspecting the stereo scene, as well as placing the rover icon in various positions within the scene, the operator can assess the trafficability of the terrain. By placing the icon in the appropriate position and orientation directly over the stereo image of the actual rover on the surface, the rover's location and heading are automatically computed. This position information is output to ASPEN to set the rover end position state. The rover driver specifies the rover's destinations by designating a series of waypoints in the scene, generating waypoint traverse commands.

¹ A Sol is a Martian day, equivalent to about 24 hours and 39 minutes

Rover data storage is a scarce resource that must be tracked within the ASPEN model. The largest consumer of data storage is the camera image activity. This activity can fill the on-board data storage if a telemetry session with the lander is not available during the data collection. ASPEN will keep track of the data storage resource to ensure that all data is downlinked before the buffer is completely full.

Status

Initial work in 1998 consisted of a preliminary proof of concept demonstration in which we used automated planning and scheduling technology integrated with WITS to demonstrate automated commanding for the Rocky-7 rover from the WITS interface. (Backes, et al., 1999) In 2000, we are providing an in-depth validation of the automated command-generation concept. The ASPEN planning and scheduling system will be integrated with the Rover Control Workstation (RCW) and WITS. ASPEN will receive RML formatted high-level requests from the activity interface. ASPEN will then automatically generate validated rover-command sequences that satisfy these requests and provide those RML formatted sequences to the Rover Control Workstation. The ASPEN Java-based interface will enable the user to access planned activities and to observe resource and state constraints. The computation intensive aspects of the commanding capability (such as the planner/scheduler, path planner, uncertainty estimation software, vision and image processing software, etc.) will reside on one or more rover workstations based in a central location.

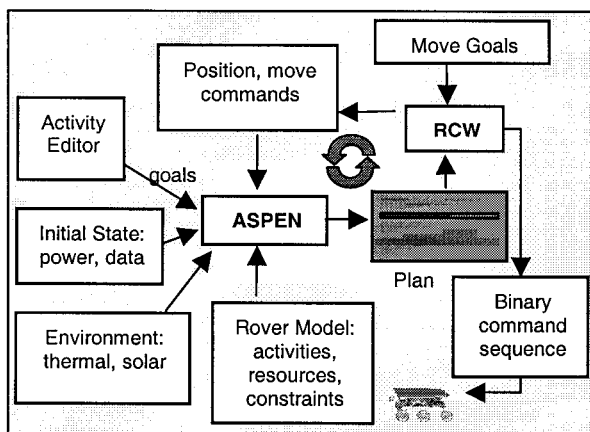


Figure 3 - End-to-End Commanding System

The end-to-end data flow for this system is shown in Figure 3. The interaction between ASPEN and RCW is an iterative process. Both ASPEN and RCW will receive high-level goals. The RCW input goals will be related to rover motion. RCW will output traverse commands for input into ASPEN. ASPEN will merge these with other science and engineering goals to produce an intermediate level plan. The plan will be output to RCW to update motion commands as necessary. This process will continue until an acceptable plan is generated. Finally a

time ordered list of commands would be output for sequence generation.

The Sojourner ASPEN model is nearly complete and ready for testing. Initial testing on a sample of 136 activities produced a conflict free plan in about 9 seconds. This testing was completed on a Sun Ultra-2 workstation. These relatively quick plan cycles will allow the Sojourner Rover operations team to perform "what-if" analysis on different daily plans. Our goal is that this quick planning capability will be used to generate commands more frequently than once-per-day, if communications opportunities permit.

Our next level of testing will involve generating plans for two typical Sojourner rover days on Mars. These plans will be compared with the manually generated sequences that were run during the Sojourner mission. As a result of these tests, minor updates to the model may be required. Once the model is validated, we will integrate ASPEN with RCW. The highlighted boxes show the planner that would be used at both the science planning and engineering planning level. The planner model would contain sufficient engineering information to ensure that the vast majority of science requests finally approved are feasible from an engineering standpoint. Eventually we would like to add performance metrics to the planner model to optimize the generated plans. This will enable automated "what-if" analysis to generate plans that maximize science and engineering value.

Mars Exploration Rover

The goal of this automated planning work would be a deployment on a future mission such as the 2003 rovers. With far greater mobility than the 1997 Mars Pathfinder rover, these robotic explorers will be able to trek up to 100 meters (about 110 yards) across the surface each Martian day. Each Mars 2003 rover will carry a sophisticated set of instruments that will allow it to search for evidence of liquid water that may have been present in the planet's past. (See Figure 4.) The rovers will be identical to each other, but will land at different regions of Mars.

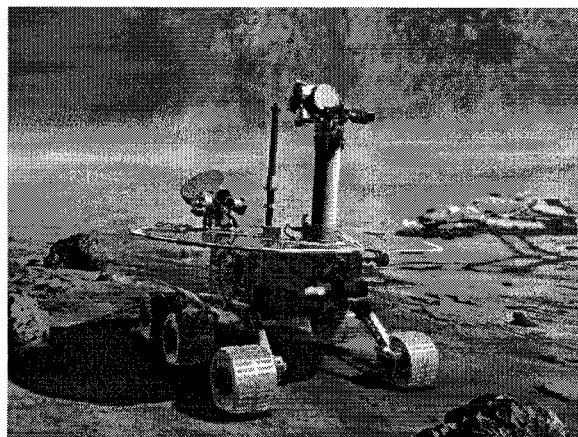


Figure 4 - Mars Exploration Rover

Both rovers are planned for launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, during June 2003 for an early 2004 arrival. The landed portion of the Mars Exploration Rover mission features a design dramatically different from Mars Pathfinder's. Where Pathfinder had scientific instruments on both the lander and the small Sojourner rover, these larger rovers will carry all their instruments with them.

Using images and spectra taken daily from the rovers, scientists will command the vehicle to go to rock and soil targets of interest and evaluate their composition and their texture at microscopic scales. Initial targets may be close to the landing sites, but later targets can be far afield: These exploration rovers will be able to travel almost as far in one Martian day as the Sojourner rover did over its entire lifetime.

Rocks and soils will be analyzed with a set of five instruments on each rover, and a special tool called the rock abrasion tool, or "RAT," will be used to expose fresh rock surfaces for study. Each rover has a mass of nearly 150 kilograms (about 300 pounds) and has a range of up to 100 meters (about 110 yards) per sol, or Martian day. Surface operations will last for at least 90 sols, extending to late April 2004, but could continue longer, depending on the health of the vehicles.

Onboard Rover Planning

In addition to the work with Sojourner, we are developing a dynamic, onboard planning system for rover sequence generation. The CASPER (Continuous Activity Scheduling, Planning, Execution and Re-planning) system (Chien et al., 1999; Chien et al., 2000), is a dynamic extension to ASPEN, which can not only generate rover command sequences but can also dynamically modify those sequences in response to changing operating context. If orbital or descent imagery is available, CASPER interacts with a path planner to estimate traversal lengths and to determine intermediate waypoints that are needed to navigate around known obstacles.

Once a plan has been generated it is continuously updated during plan execution to correlate with sensor and other feedback from the environment. In this way, the planner is highly responsive to unexpected changes, such as a fortuitous event or equipment failure, and can quickly modify the plan as needed. For example, if the rover wheel slippage has caused the position estimate uncertainty to grow too large, the planner can immediately command the rover to stop and perform localization earlier than originally scheduled. Or, if a particular traversal has used more battery power than expected, the planner may need to discard one of the remaining science goals. CASPER has been integrated with control software from the JPL Rocky 7 rover (Volpe et al., 2000) and is currently being tested on Rocky 7 in the JPL Mars Yard.

Conclusions

Current approaches to rover-sequence generation and validation are largely manual, resulting in an expensive, labor, and knowledge intensive process. This is an

inefficient use of scarce science-PI and key engineering staff resources. Automation as targeted by this system would automatically generate a constraint and flight rule checked time ordered list of commands and provides resource analysis options to enable users to perform more informative and fast trade-off analyses. Initial tests have shown planning times on the order of seconds rather than hours. Additionally, this technology would coordinate sequence development between science and engineering teams and would thus help speed up the consensus process.

Enabling goal-driven commanding of planetary rovers by engineering and science personnel greatly reduces the workforce requirements for highly skilled rover engineering personnel. The reduction in team size in turn reduces mission operations costs. In addition, goal-driven commanding permits a faster response to changes in rover state (e.g., faults) or science discoveries by removing the time consuming manual sequence validation process, allowing "what-if" analyses, and thus reducing overall cycle times.

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